CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Scheduled Castes constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in Indian society. They are stigmatized people and, on this account, suffer from numerous disabilities which are regulated through religious beliefs and practices. Some of the common features among them are untouchability, low economic status, segregation, lack of political power, low level of literacy and social mobility. All together reinforce the wretched condition of the Scheduled Castes. More than 85 percent population of Scheduled Castes in India is engaged in primary sector, particularly agriculture. Their proportion as agricultural labourers is considerably higher than the general population.

The condition of Scheduled Castes in terms of residence, housing, health and standard of living is precarious. Firstly, majority of them are too poor to own any property. They live and build their dwellings on land belonging to landowners who engage them as agricultural labourers. This binds them to their jobs and makes it difficult for them to change their place or occupation or both. Secondly, they continue to suffer from segregation specifically with regard to habitation. They reside at segregated places known as Harijan Ghettoes or Tolas in towns and village. Most significantly they suffer from malnutrition, disabilities and chronic health problems such as, tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria and venereal disease.
Thus, the Scheduled Castes constitute an oppressed and disadvantaged groups in Indian society. The genesis of their disadvantaged status lies in the Hindu social structure. For ages, they have been the subject of social injustice and exploitation. The Hindu social structure being rigid in nature has denied them the opportunity of social mobility. Consequently, they could not be exposed to the beneficial effect of modernisation. Their social progress remained highly restricted and they were assigned unclean and menial jobs which yielded marginal income. They were associated with a variety of traditional occupations, viz., scavenging, cobbling, basketry, fishing, etc.

The directive principles of state policy laid down in article 46, propounds that “the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”. In order to fulfil the promise of the directive principles, specific provisions have been outlined in articles 165, 275 330,332,334, 335, and 339 of the Constitution of India. Articles 330, 332 and 334 provide for the reservation of seats for scheduled castes in the states of the union and parliament. Article 338 provides for appointment, by the President, a Special Officer to ‘investigate all matters relating to safeguard provided for Scheduled Castes. Under the Constitution, he is to report to the President upon the working of these safeguards at such intervals as the
President may direct and all such reports in this regard should be laid before each House of parliament by the President”. Further, article 17 declares that “untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

There are constitutional directives to remove their disabilities and in consonance with these directives, a number of legislative and executive measures to have been taken by the central and state governments. Apart from this, special programmes have been formulated for their socio-economic development in successive five-year plans.

In pursuance of the provision of article 275, funds are provided in the five year plan documents identified, as the “lack of economic support” as the main cause of extremely slow pace of the development of scheduled castes. It is through this provision, it was thought that the normal developmental process would trickle down to the weaker sections of the society. However the experience of the planning process was not very satisfactory during the successive five-year plans which necessitated the formation of a new strategy during the 6th five-year plan. The new strategy was a combination of three programmes: the special component plan of the state and central ministries, the special central assistance, scheme, and Scheduled Castes development corporations of various states.
The contemporary Indian society is characterised by a semi-feudal social structure and this is more visible in case of Bihar. The SCs constitute the exploited and live in constant threat of oppression by the landed elite. The allotment of land is one of the major programmes for improving the economic status of scheduled castes. A large section of the scheduled caste population derive their source of livelihood by working on land of the caste Hindus. Land for distribution is available generally from three sources: (i) reclamation of cultivable waste lands (ii) surplus lands released through ceilings as agricultural holdings, and (iii) lands made available through the Bhoodan movement, and the allotment of cultivable waste after proper reclamation. The ceiling on agricultural holdings envisaged restriction of incomes at the top and raising of incomes at the lower levels. This needs to be examined the extent, to which the allotment of land is beneficial for the economic elevation of the SCs and which segment among them has been benefited more.

The provision for educational opportunities forms a very important part of the programmes for the welfare of the scheduled castes. The educational programmes in the central sector consist of the award of post-matriculation scholarships and at the state level it consists of the pre-matric scholarship. These advantages taken by the various schedule castes categories have shown a highly uneven pattern. The effect of these programmes on the various segment of scheduled castes needs to be examined.
The constitutional commitment of the post-colonial state towards the goal of equality has not been dismantled. The social opportunities offered by the state are confined to the privileged sections of society. The deprived and disadvantaged groups are still exposed to the experience of "cumulative inequality". These marginalised groups have yet to experience the multifarious benefits of development. There is a vast gap among the various segment of the scheduled caste so far the impact of development is concerned. The situation of scheduled castes has not substantially changed during the five decades of developing planning. They are still relegated at the bottom of the socio-economic structure.

The Scheduled Castes do not comprise a homogeneous group. Twenty-three castes are listed in the scheduled caste category in Bihar. Some specific scheduled castes account for the bulk of scheduled caste population of Bihar. The Chamars, the Dusadhs and the Musahars constitute more than a million each, comprising about 71 percent of the scheduled caste population. The less popular castes are scattered over in small pockets, and more popular castes are diffused throughout the state. The Kanjars, the Kurariars and the Nats are still semi-nomadic community in Bihar. The Kanjars are mainly engaged in trapping birds and hunting animals. They earn a living by selling monkeys, snakeskin and rabbit skin. Similarly Kurariar are primarily engaged in extracting honeycombs, hunting and trapping birds and small animals and selling them for money. The Nats work on acrobats, dancers and musicians for
their living. They are also found selling herbal medicine. Some of them are beggars. On account of deforestation these castes have been forced to leave traditional occupation, resulting in unemployment. Due to introduction of new technology and development process, most of the scheduled castes have lost their traditional occupation and now they are either unemployed or work as agricultural labour and most of them are landless agricultural labourer.

The 1985 report of the L.N. Mishra Institute of Economic Growth regarding the work of the Bihar Corporation for the Financial Development of the Scheduled Caste, observed that more than 95 percent of the Scheduled Caste in Bihar live below the poverty line. The majority of them remain as untouchable as before and suffer from the traditional restriction. They have no access to common places of drinking water, tea shops, restaurants, main village streets, etc. Undoubtedly, landless labourers and those at the lowest rungs of the agrarian hierarchy in central Bihar are largely drawn from the lowest of the backward castes, such as, the Lohars, Kahars, Kumhars, Telis, Nais and Chamars, Dusadhs, Doms and Musahars belonging to Scheduled Castes. A very high proportion of these lower backward and scheduled castes is landless and they work as agricultural labourers. According to a study conducted by A.N. Sinha Institute, Patna, in the eighties, roughly 61 percent of the lower backwards and 69.5 percent of scheduled castes in Bihar central plains were landless.
The dominant castes among the Scheduled Castes are the Chamar, Dusadh, Pasi and Dhobi. Other scheduled castes like Mushar, Dom, Mehtar, Rajwar, Bhuiya, Bauri, Turi, Ghasi, Nats, etc. are still at the bottom of the socio-economic structure. The four dominant scheduled caste to be in direct contact with upper castes due to the nature of their traditional occupation. Relatively, they are also economically and socially better off. They are inclined to provide education to their children too. In the traditional Indian society those who have formal education are provided with white-collar employment and therefore enjoy a better status than manual occupations. This has an impact on the socio-economic status of these castes in comparison to others. The problem today, however, is that there is a perceptible change and increasing gap taking place between the dominant scheduled castes on the one hand, and the marginals among them on the other. This phenomenon can be largely attributed to the kind of policies pursued by the ruling classes.

It can be observed that the ruling class has systematically opted the dominant castes among the SCs in each state through identifying and encouraging them for electoral politics. This has been done through various government welfare programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme and other kinds of subsidies. These programmes have mainly benefited the family clusters of the leaders of the dominant caste in the region. Though the leadership from the dominant scheduled castes has helped in articulating the overall
problems of the scheduled castes but has failed to develop the strategy of development suitable to each caste among the scheduled castes. The reservations for them have not been very helpful because it has not reached the most backward scheduled castes. This is because of manipulation done by the upper castes along with dominant SCs who are co-opted for political reasons. For them, the problem of the scheduled caste is a non-issue except when it is to be used for political ends. The bureaucracy dominated mainly by the caste Hindus is a major obstacle for the scheduled castes. All the welfare programmes, schemes and plans for them remain on paper. If implemented only haphazardly and the benefits do not reach the needy. The funds allocated are diverted to other heads or remain unspent and even returned to the central government and the state governments. The governmental schemes do not take into account the specific requirements of various scheduled castes. There are several castes in Bihar which are specific to a particular region. The general policies pursued by the government cannot address the specific problems of those castes and the benefits received by each caste are not uniformly distributed.

According to National Sample Survey (1993), 71.14 percent population of the Scheduled Castes of Bihar is below the poverty line and 92 percent of them live in rural areas where the main source of their income is agriculture. They work as agricultural labourer and some of them are engaged in non-agricultural self-employment. The wage pattern
in Bihar reflects highly exploitative pattern. In central Bihar wage of the labourer is only 3 kilograms of rice per day whereas the official minimum daily wage in Bihar is Rs 51.10 per day. The Scheduled Castes who work as 'harwahas' get only one kilogram of rice and half of kilogram of 'sattu' as daily payment in kind. The main issues concerning the scheduled castes in Bihar at present are: (i) acquiring land for them, (ii) giving the right to cultivate the plot received from the government in accordance with the agrarian reforms, and (iii) raising the wages of scheduled caste agricultural workers.

There are 90.97 percent of the scheduled castes in Bihar who live in rural areas and they are mostly Musahar, Bantar, Bhogta, Chaupal, Bhuiya, Dusadh and Chamar. Around 75.64 percent of Scheduled Castes earn population their livelihood by working as agricultural labourers but they are not employed round the year. They manage to get seasonal and low paid employment. Very few of them own land as small and marginal farmers. Among the scheduled castes a very few of the Chamars, Dusadhs, Pasis and Dhobis have cultivable land and most of Doms, Mehtar, Rajwar, Bhuiya, Musahar and Nats are landless. They are either wage labourer or engaged in some kind of non agricultural self employment.

The Scheduled Castes are still far behind the general population in terms of literacy and formal education. The literacy percentage of
Scheduled Castes in Bihar is only 18.43 while for the general population it is 38.54 percent according to 1991 census. The majority of the scheduled castes live in ignorance, although among the Dhobis, Pasis, Dusadhs, and Chamars, one can notice an increasing trend of literacy but not among all, particularly, the Musahars, the Bhuiyas. The process of globalization demands better specialization, professionalization, skill and training formation among all the sections of population but only a small section of the scheduled caste population can afford to invest in for professional degrees and training. The paradox of equality of opportunity and equality of results remains unresolved. The majority of scheduled castes do not complete even their primary education. Even the students who are enrolled in the school do not attend their classes. As they are engaged either as child labour, wage earners or non-wage domestic workers.

The facilities in the area of education, such as, pre-and post-matric scholarships, hostels, special coaching for professional education, freeship and scholarships for studies in India and abroad have proved to be of immense benefit but, they are inadequate and not properly regulated. These facilities are utilised marginally, bureaucratic procedures make their proper distribution difficult. As a result, they do not reach the needy in time. The result is that educational attainment and motivation get badly affected. There is no uniform procedure to provide these facilities at the state level. Every state has different criteria
and mechanisms. Even if there are such facilities for them, they are not properly channelised due to negligence and administrative problems. As a result, they remain out of school and stagnate. The non-enrolment among the scheduled castes is a major problem. Only a small segment of their children are evoked, although their enrolment is affected by caste, gender and regional factors. The goal of achieving universal elementary primary education is being repeated in every Five Year Plan, but it has not yet been implemented. Most of the children in the age group of six to fourteen years who remain out of school due to their social background are primarily from the scheduled caste background. Another problem among them is educational stagnation, especially upto the secondary school level absenteeism and drop-out are regular features among them due to their services required of pupils at home for domestic purposes. This is also due to the lack of guidance and lack of learning materials for such children. The problem of stagnation and dropout is more prevalent among the rural Scheduled Caste boys and girls. A study reveals that when 100 scheduled caste students are enrolled in standard 1, only 40 move on to standard 4 only 7 to 8 children move and up to standard 10 and only a few survive upto college level education, while in today's context, the higher level of education is a necessity to get into white collar jobs.

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1 Gare, G.M. 1974, Socio-Economic Study of the Scheduled Castes in Rural Maharashtra, Research Abstracts quarterly, 2 (2 and 3).
In the contemporary India, specific developmental programmes aim at the upliftment of the scheduled castes by promoting desirable social change. They are planned strategies for social change in a direction, considered desirable by the society. They are culture and group-specific programmes. They aim at eradication of poverty, socio-economic inequalities, redistribution of resources, expansion of education, equitable distribution of wealth, wages and salaries, harmonious relationships among various social groups and communities. Those programmes of development of the scheduled castes. Refers to the overall transformations of individuals, various social groups and the society, so that, every person lives with dignity. They are means to achieve the principles of equality, justice, secularism, socialism and democracy. These principles are taken into account for purposes of planning for development which broken up into specific social and economic policies and programmes. Thus, the developmental programmes meant for them, one consciously formulated directions of social change among the SCs. One specific scheme as part of social development in the rural development scheme, 1999 which focuses on the theme of regional disparities and the problem of poverty. It is an effort to analyse various facets of rural development: agriculture, and economic inequality, labour infrastructure, gender and environmental problems. The report on rural development programmes has indices viz. social development index, and infrastructure development index for the NSS regions. The social
development index is based on the following: (a) female literacy, (b) education standard, (c) drinking water facility, (d) toilet facility, (e) housing status, (f) electrification and, (g) access to Public Distribution System.

The infrastructure development index is based on irrigation, road density, market density, electrification, communication, education, medical facility and drinking water supply. These indices are interrelated and the overall rural development is expected to uplift the Backward Castes. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the effect of such developmental programmes of the government on selected scheduled castes groups.

The social problems of scheduled castes are known at large. The state government has made efforts in evolving multidimensional welfare policies and measures with high hopes of bringing about radical changes in the condition of the scheduled castes within the shortest possible period. Our study is directed towards those developmental programmes which are meant for the Scheduled Castes. The study focuses on the changes taken place in various categories of scheduled castes within the framework of those schemes. The aspects covered in the study are: (1) occupational changes, (2) education and training for self-employment, (3) nature of work and income, (4) health and nutrition, (5) social awareness and participation, (6) changes in the pattern of housing.
1. To study the level of social awareness about various governmental measures of social change among the scheduled castes and also to examine the degree of participation of scheduled castes in various welfare schemes.

2. To study the facilities pertaining to health, hygiene, and nutrition available to them under various government sponsored schemes.

3. To study the changes in their pattern of living, particularly the housing patterns.

4. To study the nature of work engaged in and the sources of income among various segments of the scheduled castes.

5. To study the changes in educational status including training programmes for self-employment among them.

6. To study the patterns of occupational mobility among them.

7. To study the changing patterns of relationship within the scheduled castes and in relation to other castes.